

Kinship Care in the U.S: Policy Developments and Best Practices

Presentation for the Virginia
Commission on Youth

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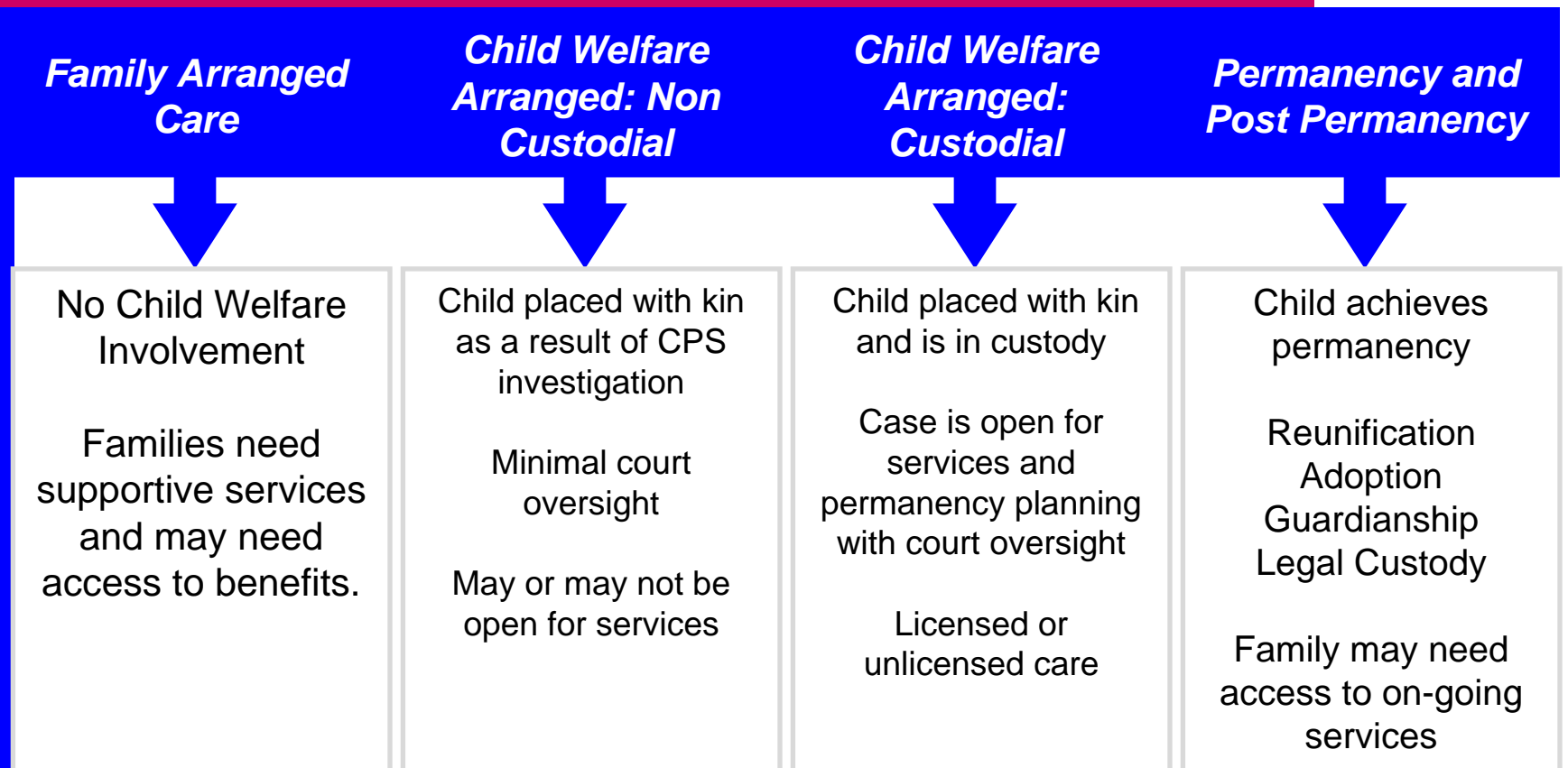
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Overview of Presentation

- Kinship care in context
- Recent policy developments at the federal level
- Best practices in the states for finding, engaging, approving and supporting kinship families
- Kinship care in Virginia

The Kinship Care Continuum



Why Kinship Care for Abused and Neglected Children?

- Increases stability for children during time in foster care
- Reduces trauma
- Increases likelihood of being placed with siblings
- Helps children maintain familial and cultural ties important to their well-being

Recent Research

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (June 2008)

- National sample -- 1,309 children removed from their homes 3 years post placement
- 2/3 in long last settings as compared to 1/3 of children in traditional foster care
- 32% were at risk of behavioral problems as compared to 46% risk in traditional foster care

Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine 5

Recent Research

Colorado State University (2006)

- Children in kinship placements experienced fewer placements
- Children in traditional foster care were 2X more likely to re-enter care and 6X more likely to be involved with Youth Corrections
- Children in foster care were 2X more likely to be reunified with their parents

Child Welfare Outcomes in Colorado: A Matched Comparison between Children in Kinship Care and Foster Care

Data Snapshot

Pew Center for Research report released
September 2010 based on 2008 Census
data

- 2.9 million children living with grandparents who are the primary caregivers in 2008
- 6% increase between 2007-2008
- 16% increase since 2000

Data Snapshot

- In 2009, 24% of children in foster care were placed with relatives
- 30% of the families who adopted from foster care with relatives (increase of 9% since 2000)
- 7% of children exited foster care to guardianship; 8% “living with other relative”

(AFCARS, preliminary estimates for 2009)

Kinship Care Challenges: Philosophical

- When government intervenes on behalf of a child, what are the legal and moral responsibilities to support that child?
- How do we undo corrosive myths about vulnerable families (i.e. the apple doesn't fall far from the tree)

Kinship Care Challenges: Systemic

- How do we take a system designed for traditional foster care and make it work for kin families?
- How do we find the right balance between kinship care as a diversion from foster care and kinship care for children in state custody?

Children and Families Speak Out for Kinship Care

Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008

- Relative Notice
- Kinship Guardianship Assistance Fund
- Sibling Connections
- Licensing Waivers



Best Practices in Kinship Care

- Finding kin
- Engaging kin families
- Approving kin as foster parents
- Supporting all kin families



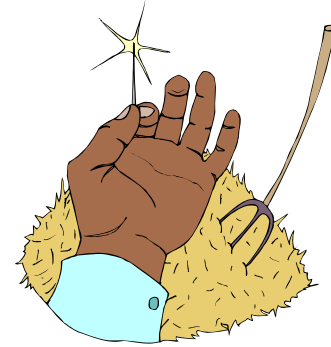
Finding Kin



Compliance with Notice Provision of Fostering Connections

- Majority of states have written notice
- Best practices:
 - strategies for documentation of notice (i.e. SACWIS)
 - asking relatives to identify others in family network
 - State technical assistance for implementation of notice

Finding Kin



Other diligent search methods

- Using a broad definition of kin

- Talking to youth and parents

- Genograms

- Family team meetings and court hearings

- Applying technological resources

- On-going diligent search

- Fire walls at initial placement

Engaging and Educating Kin

- Full disclosure of all options
 - What is in the best interests of the child: diversion from foster care or state custody?
 - Family team meetings, orientation sessions, resource parent support, court hearings
- Presentation of roles beyond placement
- Support for kin to become full members of the family team
- Respect for the role that kin can play to reduce trauma and enhance stability

Approval of Kin



- Developing a team approach to initial, expedited placements
- Creating special kinship care units or specialized contracts with providers
- Developing specialized training for kin caregivers
 - Help kin deal with immediate needs of child
 - Incorporate content on challenges of changing roles and family dynamics

Approval of Kin

- Removing Barriers to Licensing
 - Identify licensing barriers for kin
 - Are barriers safety or non safety issues?
 - Appreciate the differences between kin and non kin placements
 - Change agency policy/administrative rule to create a clearly articulated policy
 - Create a higher level of review

Support for Kin Families

- Ensuring equity for kin families through licensing as foster parents
- Identifying community resources for kin (support groups, legal counsel, aging departments, etc.)
- Federal guardianship assistance program to achieve permanency for children and youth in foster care who can not return home or be adopted

Progress for Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP)

9 states have approved state plan amendments and are implementing GAP

RI, PA, TN, MI, OR,
NJ, MT, IL, and DC

10 states are awaiting federal approval for their plans:

CO, CT, ME, MA, MD,
MO, NE, SD, TX,
WA

Virginia “Diversión” Study

Collaboration between Virginia Department of Social Services and the Annie E. Casey Foundation

Learn current practices and philosophies in Virginia for using kin as prevention from custody

Inform development of kinship practice model

We think, based on experience in many states, that diversion is a common practice sometimes being implemented without sufficient attention to safety, permanency or well-being.

Assumptions About Current Common “Diversion” Practice

(preventing foster care by placing children informally with kin)

- Minimal safety assessment
- Short-term reunification plans/services to birth parents
- Limited legal authority, services or resources for kin
- Often no disclosure to kin of available options
- Limited follow up to determine if child is safe
- Unclear plans for permanency
- No data tracking (re-entry)

IMPLICATIONS

Lack of Permanency

Safety/Stability
Concerns

Parents/Kin without
Services/Supports

Given the reality that questionable practice often exists and will likely continue, we may be in a position to develop a practice model that improves supports for children & families.



Potential New Practice Model

Children

- Permanency Planning
- Home Safety Assessment
- Data Tracking

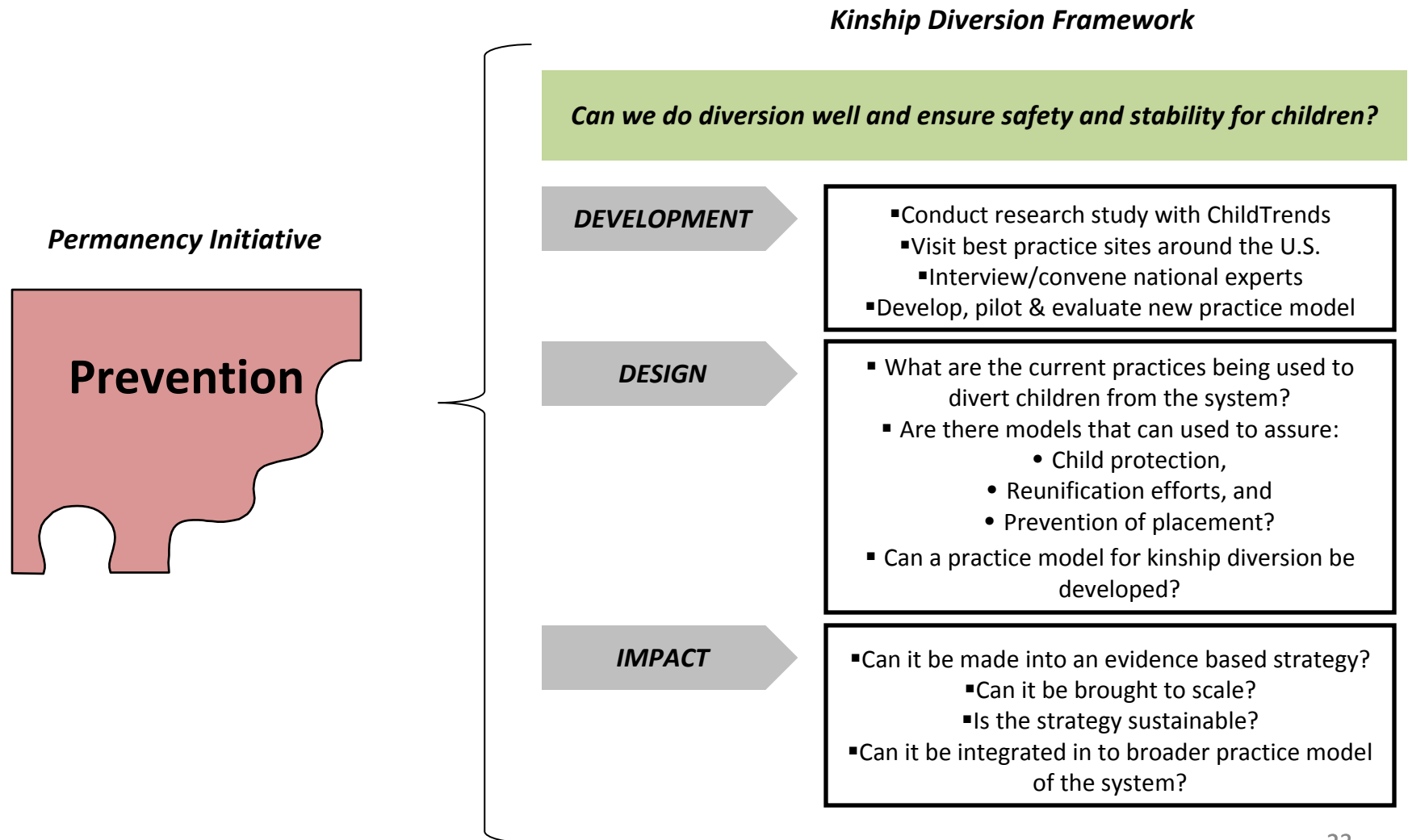
Birth Parents

- Rights Honored
- Connection to Child
- Reunification
Resources/Supports

Kin

- Legal Guardianship
- Available Options
- Services and Supports

Virginia will lead the country in helping develop a prevention strategy focused on building system practice, and hopefully evidence-based practice, for kinship diversion to be applied in other states and localities.



Study Participants

- County administrators and program managers
- Intake and investigative unit supervisors
- Intake, investigative, ongoing workers, TANF child-only workers
- Kinship caregivers
- Judges, community stakeholders

Issues to Guide the Research Questions

- Family awareness of options
 - Kin awareness of options available with being in or out of the system
 - Child welfare staff understanding of available resources for kin
- Birth parent rights
 - Birth parents role in decision to divert
 - Reunification services and support (with and without the assistance of the agency)

Issues to Guide the Research Questions

- Assessing safety and stability
 - Ensuring child will be safe and stable in kin caregiver's home
 - Ongoing supervision of case
- Services and supports for youth, birth parents, and kin including financial supports
 - Ongoing services to maintain the placement and ensure family well-being

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